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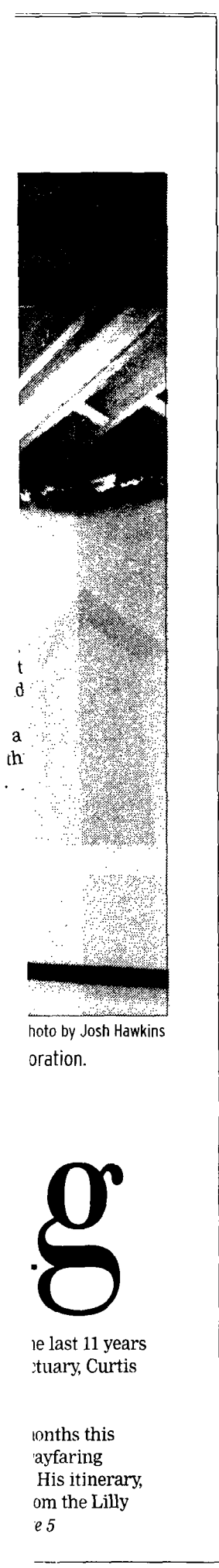


photo by Josh Hawkins
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'The ball is rolling'

With Park District sanction,
and a steering committee
coming, official planning
of DuSable Park begins

By LYDIALYLE GIBSON
Staff Writer

As of last week, the planning of DuSable Park—a three-acre patch of weeds jutting out just south of Navy Pier—is afoot. Truth be told, it's been afoot for awhile now; a great many people have spent a great many months—years, even—spinning plans for the grassy namesake of the city's seldom-sung father. But freed last fall from any traces of radioactive thorium contamination, DuSable Park is now ready for some official plan-making. Last week, Park District higher-ups assigned Project Manager Dan Purciarello the task of marshaling local input for a design for the greenspace, and sometime next month, Purciarello hopes to launch the proceedings with a public meeting and an open call for steering-committee volunteers. Already, a host have signed up, including nearby residents, Friends of the Parks, the Grant Park Advisory Council, the 75-year-old DuSable League, and a group of rowers keen on a little people-powered access to the river. "DuSable Park is unique, because there've been so many people involved over the last couple years that, really, a lot of people are active already," said Park District spokesman Anne Ziolkowski, who insisted she couldn't guess just how long the planning—or the construction—of DuSable Park might take. "Now we need to strategize on how to get the park built." Dedicated by Harold Washington back in 1987, DuSable Park languished for 13 years, until someone unearthed thorium contamination there following a three-month fracas over city intentions to turn the greenspace into a temporary parking lot. That discovery froze any official efforts to lay down a couple rolls of sod or a park bench in DuSable Park, while Park District officials waited for the all-clear from the Environmental Protection Agency. And after a painless two-day cleanup in October that washed DuSable Park clean, the EPA left the place to the park planners. At least one piece of the DuSable Park puzzle is already in place. Five years ago, officials at the Art Institute's Ferguson Fund commissioned artist Martin Puryear to carve a monumental sculpture of Jean Baptiste Pointe du Sable for the park's centerpiece. About that same time, Park District officials, with some guidance from a few neighborhood pillars and consultants hired out of Ann Arbor, Mich., sketched a preliminary drawing for DuSable Park. Ziolkowski said that design could at least provide a starting point.
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DuSable plans underway

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"It's still a good plan, but it just depends on whether we tweak that design or come up with a new one," Ziolkowski said.

Bob O'Neill, president of the Grant Park Advisory Council and a longtime nipper at Park District heels, said he hopes DuSable Park's plan will evolve the way a revamp for Grant Park and an expansion of Chinatown's Ping Tom Park did—with lots of public discussion.

"The Park District is definitely involved and starting to work on it," O'Neill said. "They're taking it seriously like Grant Park and Ping Tom. The Park District will take this over now as their park and their project."

O'Neill said the Park District won't want for local involvement.

"Oh, sure," he said. "Lake Point Tower is right on the park, and it's huge. And there are residents just to the west, and also the residents who line Randolph. And I'd like to get Navy Pier involved, too."

Where park builders are more likely to have trouble is in finding the money to fund whatever design emerges from the swarm of meetings. According to Ziolkowski, there's no money in the Park District coffers for



Chicago Journal file photo

Carrying trowels and silver bowls, workmen scooped out DuSable Park's thorium contamination last October.

DuSable Park's development. Besides the Puryear sculpture, whatever rises from the weeds will be independently bankrolled.

"Part of the plans are how to raise the money for the park," Ziolkowski said. "We'll need grants to get that going."

O'Neill said he remains undaunted. Besides the Ferguson Fund money, which he hopes might stretch a little beyond Puryear's efforts, DuSable Park has some \$600,000 coming to it from executives at MCL Companies, who'll be putting up lakefront condominiums a few blocks north at Lakeshore East.

"We want to talk to the

[Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority] also," O'Neill said. "I mean, DuSable Park is so close to Navy Pier. And the people who want the rowing center, they'll raise the money for that. We're trying to make it like Ping Tom Park, with lots of different constituents, so there are lots of different funding opportunities. ... Another area being explored is the money attached to the sculpture. You can't just put a statue in an empty field. And then all sorts of grants and foundations."

"The ball is rolling," Ziolkowski said. "The Park District wants to move this forward."

Near West juvy hall on the mend